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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether prime-time television shows have an effect on the image of reading and/or reading activities through their content. The sample consisted of 39 third-grade students in a suburban area of New Jersey. A survey was presented for background information and the top three prime-time television shows were selected. Subjects viewed the shows for a three-week period and completed reaction sheets indicating whether or not reading was portrayed in the shows, and what effect the shows may have had on the subject's reading attitude. Results indicated that two of the shows supported the hypothesis that prime-time television shows promote a positive image of reading and/or reading activities through their content, while the third show only partially supported the hypothesis. (Four tables of data are included; 18 references are attached.) (RS)

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The Effect of Prime Time Television Shows on the Image of Reading and/or Reading Activities through their Content

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find out whether or not prime time television shows have an effect on the image of reading and/or reading activities through their content. The sample studied consisted of 39 third grade students in a suburban area of New Jersey. A survey was presented for background information and the top three prime time television shows were selected. The shows were viewed for a three week period and data was recorded and analyzed.

After the data was analyzed it was concluded that two of the three shows viewed supported the hypothesis, while the third only partially supported the hypothesis.

Acknowledgement

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The invention of television has certainly changed the lives of people over the years. It has been one of the most important means of communication since the 1950's. Although television can contribute to what a viewer learns by widening his/her experiences, it may also contribute to harmful impressions of the world.

Television is a means of taking a person to any location and visually presenting any subject matter. It involves many of our senses, and depending how a program is presented, can promote a variety of feelings. It introduces us to people we will probably never meet and takes us to realms we can only dream of. Television can create diversion, present issues, advertise, waste time, as well as stimulate the intellect of its viewers.

Television consumes a great deal of our time. According to Wagoner (1975) television occupies the largest amount of our time next to sleeping. Of all age groups, teenagers and children watch the most television..

Ninety-seven percent, or eighty-nine million, of the homes in the U.S. contain at least one television set. Sixty percent of the homes have two or more TV sets. In 1987 there were 197,000,000 television sets in the U.S. , and 716,000,000 sets in the world. The average television is on for seven hours per day.

Many studies have presented viewpoints on the relationship of television viewing to reading. For example, Hamilton (1976) concluded that television, by using "TV tie-ins", provided many reluctant readers incentives to read. Solomon (1976) developed a "scripting" technique to motivate the low achiever.
Steinberg (1983) suggested that "the more we watch television, the more we will read, because in reality TV is the most important promoter of reading."

On the other hand, (Schmidtcher, 1968, 1974) argues that "reading, especially the reading of books, was being impeded by television viewing." Schmidtcher also concluded that television will "reduce us to the state of illiteracy."

In order to make any type of judgement, parents as well as educators must obtain and examine more information on television and its influences. Television viewing, especially in the 1990's, must be viewed with discretion. Many programs deal with many issues, especially during the prime-time hours. In my opinion, it is beneficial and adventageous for parents and educators to be aware of what is shown in this time period. Prime time TV can give insight to viewers on what issues our children face on a daily basis. We must all work together to provide a supportive experience for viewers.

The research and opinions continue. The common conclusion is that more sophisticated research needs to be done in order to draw any conclusions on the relationship between television and reading. (Neuman 1980) Reading programs as well as television programs must be sensitive to trends, and their instructional objectives must be relevant to the realities of the learners.

THE PROBLEM AND HYPOTHESIS

At present there are many factors that discourage children from establishing good reading habits.

With the beginning of each school year also comes the beginning of new fall television programs. Children arrive at their favorite television choices within weeks and viewing patterns begin. The viewing of television has both positive and negative effects.

Other deterents from reading may include: video games, computer games, and the unlimited accessability of videos. Although the previously mentioned activities distract children from reading, there is no bigger culprit than television. With the amount of time children spend on the activities mentioned above, it is a concern as to what messages are being transmitted to the children. While many messages can be examined, this study will attempt to determine if several prime time television shows promote a positive or negative image toward reading by examining the content to which children are exposed.

Hypothesis

For the purpose of this study it was hypothesized that prime time television shows promote a positive image of reading and/or reading activities through their content.

Procedures

The television viewing and reading habits of 39 third grade students in a suburban school district were surveyed utilizing the following questions:

Telvision Watching Survey

1. How many television sets are there in your home?
2. Do you have a television set in your room?
3. Do you watch television before you go to school?
   What do you watch?
4. Do you watch television after school?
   What do you watch?
5. How late do you stay up on a school night? weekends?
6. Do you like to read?

7. What is your favorite type of book?
8. How long each day do you spend reading?
9. List your top three favorite shows between 7:30 and 9:00.
10. Why do you like these shows?
11. Do any of these shows talk about reading books?
12. Who is your favorite character or person on television show?
13. Do they like to read?
14. How do you know?

Responses to the questions were tallied and the results were shared with the class so they could begin to observe the top three shows. A quantity of reaction sheets, as seen below, were then given to each child with the directions to watch their favorite shows for a three week period, beginning January 27, 1992, and hand in reaction sheets as soon as they were completed.

Reaction Sheet

Name of Show:

Time of Show:

Channel of Show:

1. Did you see any books on the sets of this show?

   yes no

2. Was anyone reading on this show?

   yes no

3. Were they enjoying what they were reading?

   yes no

4. Did this show say anything about reading?

   yes no

5. Was it good or bad?

   good bad

6. Did this show make you want to read after you saw it?

   yes no

The data reported below was then analyzed to test the hypothesis of this study.

Results

Table I illustrates the findings of the preliminary background survey

Table I
Preliminary Background Survey

1. How many television sets in home?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
0%	10%	28%	21%	28%	2%	8%	2%

2. Television set in third graders rooms?

yes-49% no-51%

3. Television watched before school? after school?

	yes	no	sometimes	no response
before school	44%	38%	15%	2%
after school	69%	28%	0%	2%

4. Subject matter viewed

news	cartoons	other	play Nintendo
8%	80%	10%	2%

5. Bedtimes of third graders---weekdays weekends

	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	11:00	11:30	12:00
weekdays-	3%	13%	50%	22%	6%	6%	0%	0%	0%	0%
weekends-	0%	3%	0%	24%	18%	36%	0%	9%	3%	0%

6. Like to read?

yes-92% no-3% a little-5%

7. Favorite types of books?

All	Mystery	Comic	Fiction	Biography	Animal	Adventure
6%	23%	17%	17%	6%	9%	11%

Science	Sports Magazines
3%	9%

8. Time spent reading daily (in minutes)?

0	5	10	20	30	60	120
3%	3%	3%	8%	39%	32%	13%

9. Favorite television shows-top three?

Family Matters	Full House	The Simpson's
11.2%	15.9%	15.9%

10. Reasons for watching the most popular shows

Funny	Good	Action	Interesting	Cool	Family Shows
53%	13%	8%	3%	8%	5%

Exciting	Learn Stuff
8%	3%

11. Do the favorite shows talk about books?

Yes-22% No-66% Sometimes-13%

12. Favorite television characters?

Bart Simpson	Kids on Full House	Steve Urkel
44%	25%	6%

13. Do the favorite characters like reading?

    Yes-47% No-34% Not sure-19%

14. How do you know the characters like or dislike reading?

    Watch TV instead 19% Read on show 38% Say "reading is fun" 19%

    Dad reads to them 5% Wears glasses 5% Go to school 5%

    Says "doesn't like school or studying" 5%

conducted.

Table I illustrates that the average home in this population has between two and four televisions, that they are being viewed both after and before school, and that approximately half of the subjects have television sets in their rooms, which may or may not be monitored as to viewing times and programs.

Most of the population appear to enjoy cartoons as well as reading. Their bedtimes are mostly between 8:30 and 9:00 on weekdays, and between 9:00 and 10:00 on weekends.

Most children listed their favorite type of book as being mystery with the average child reading between thirty and sixty minutes daily.

The children's favorite shows were Family Matters, Full House, and The Simpson's. The remaining percentages of

favorite shows were scattered among various television shows. Each show receiving a vote of two to three percentage points each. Their favorite characters included Bart Simpson, and the kids on Full House. As can be seen in the data the children felt that the shows they watch do not talk about books, that there also was not any difference, to the children, as to whether or not their favorite characters enjoyed reading. They "knew" their characters liked to read because some type of reading was done on the show. The children felt that their favorite characters did not enjoy reading if they watched television instead.

The observations of the targeted shows began on Tuesday, January 28th, 1992. The first show that was viewed for a three week period was Full House. The show was viewed on channel 7 at 8:00-8:30. The first show dealt with one daughter, Stephanie, being certain that she was going to win the fourth grade spelling bee, only the results were not what she hoped for. While Michelle, the youngest daughter, wanted to learn to read. The second show observed on February 4, 1992. The subject matter dealt with two of the girls deciding they did not want to room with the third sister. The third episode, which took place on February 11, 1992, dealt with a primate researcher, who happened to be Danny's sister, that arrives for a job interview with her monkey. The children observed the three episodes with the results shown in table II. The

data illustrated that Full House utilizes books on its set,

Table II
Full House Observations

Observed data from the series Full House	yes	no
Books on the set	73%	36%
Reading taking place	100%	0%
Enjoyment of reading observed	93%	7%
Desire to read after show	60%	40%
Anything said about reading	good	bad
	100%	0%

that reading takes place, that enjoyment of reading is observed, that a large majority of its viewers were stimulated to want to read after the shows and that 100% of this sample observed/heard good things about reading.

The next set of shows that were watched were from the series The Simpson's. This show is seen on Thursday evenings on channel 5 from 8:00-8:30. The first show watched dealt with Homer, the father, being in a mental hospital. The second show dealt with stress and the need for Marge, the mother, to leave her family for a solitary vacation. The third episode dealt with Bart, the son, having to have a month of detention because he answers his teacher's personal ad with letters from "Mr. Wonderful." Seventeen children were not allowed to view this show because of parental disapproval of subject matter. Table III illustrates that approximately half of the children saw books on the set. However, no reading

Table III
The Simpson's Observations

Observed data from the series The Simpson's	yes	no
Books of set	54%	46%
Reading taking place	26%	74%
Enjoyment of reading observed	12%	88%
Desire to read after show	0%	100%
Anything said about reading	good 12%	bad 23%	undecided 64%

took place as far as two-thirds of the students were concerned, that when reading was observed, the character was not enjoying it, and that no one had the desire to read after viewing these shows.

The final show viewed was Family Matters. This show is on channel 7 on Friday nights from 8:00-8:30. The first show dealt with the sharing of family history from a grandmother to her grandchildren and their friends. The second show dealt with Urkel, the main character, enrolling in a home-ec class to impress his "girlfriend." The third show dealt with Urkel trying to win his "girlfriend" on Valentine's Day. However, she had set her eyes on a smooth-talker who had plans to dump her if he doesn't get his way. Table IV illustrates that books and reading were

Table IV
Family Matters Observations

Observed data from the series Family Matters	yes	no
Books on the set	83%	17%
Reading taking place	83%	17%
Enjoyment of reading observed	50.5%	49.5%
Desire to read after the show	8%	92%
Anything said about reading	good 50.5%	bad 49.5%

observed by most of the audience, that the children could not decide if the subjects were enjoying what they were reading, and that most of the population did not desire to read after viewing these shows.

Conclusions

Based on the data of the study and within its limitations, the hypothesis that prime time television shows promote a positive image of reading and/or reading activities through their content is highly supported on two of the three most popular shows and partially supported on the third. Therefore, this hypothesis is conditionally accepted with the cautious observations that the strengths of the affect needs to be determined since one negative show may indeed affect pupils attitudes in a more pronounced fashion than a positive one.

The three television shows observed dealt with varying subject matters and methods of presentation. The overall data indicated that children observed reading on prime-time shows, however, the interpretation as to positive or negative images of the information varies from child to child and from show to show. Individual perceptions of children and parents influence the viewing of television on a daily basis as well as the interpretation of what is being viewed.

Children continue to read; however, based on the above data, television occupies a greater part of the child's day. Whether it be for company or enjoyment, television is a part of children's lives that continues to grow.

We as parents and educators must be an active part of children's lives. We must model, and guide children so that they can objectively analyze and interpret the printed and visual cues being given all around them. Television and books are an integral part of daily life. It is up to the individual to process the information obtained from both sources and guide the children so that they benefit from both sources.

Data must continue to be gathered and analyzed during our changing times. We may ask ourselves, "Are our children learning more from television than from school?" Only the individual can answer this question and plan for future television viewing generations to come.

Television Viewing and Reading Achievement:

Related Literature

Related Research

According to the World Book Encyclopedia (1990) the name television comes from the Greek word meaning far and a Latin word meaning to see. Therefore, television means to see far. Television brings to us many visual and audible experiences that otherwise we would not be able to enjoy. Some believe television has had a positive effect each and every time it is viewed. It teaches and explains concepts, it tests our awareness, and creates images in our own minds. It can be an extension or introduction to literature. Television can potentially bring us a wealth of information.

Other people argue that television is detremental to our society. Some believe television brings out many behaviors in people, as well as providing decreased scores in reading, and cause many children to be more interested in television rather than school and outside experiences.

Some say there is definately a relationship between television viewing and reading, while others say "no." What is the relationship? Many have asked. Contradictory judgements have been made over and over again. No matter what their views, everyone seems to argue that children do indeed watch television, learn from it, react in many ways to it, and are changed by it more and more each day.

Television was not developed until the 1920's, and its importance in communication was not recognized until the late 1940's. Then between 1940 and 1950 the television became a part of almost every household in the United States. Since then, television's importance has increased and expanded into most other countries.

The uses of television are endless. They include: Commercial, Public, Subscription, Closed-circuit, Video entertainment systems, as well as Televised information services. Each meeting different needs. Public and Cable systems continue to broaden the availability of subject matter to be viewed.

Television affects many aspects of a person's like. During one's leisure time, television can replace such activities as reading, conversation, exercise, and social gatherings. Learning effects may vary. For some, television may widen a person's experiences. For others, it may contribute to one's harmful impressions of the world. As an enriched experience, television can provide viewers with a vast variety of new experiences without stepping out of the home. "Travel" is possible, as well a obtaining world wide information virtually twenty-four hours a day. It provides a look at the reality of all aspects of life.

The research done on the impact of television on reading and/or school achievement began in the 1950's. Witty (1951) found that intelligence was unrelated to the amount of time spent watching television. Witty (1959) recorded the amount of children's television viewing over a decade. Witty found that elementary school children preferred television to almost any other activity, and spent three hours a day watching it.

Scott (1956) found that students who watched fewer hours of television had higher achievement scores.

Himmelweit (1958) made a large scale survey study and found that television had not created viewers who were better or worse at any other school subject.

Greenstein (1954) found evidence of sixth grade students who owned a television consistently achieved higher in school than those who did not own a television set.

Schramm (1961) and Himmelweit (1958) agreed, elementary school children with the highest grades in school were also the heaviest television watchers.

Opposite findings were reported by Mahoney (1953) and Scott (1954). They both reported that televison acted as a negative instrument. They found that the children attained higher achievement scores were those that watched fewer hours of television.

Milkovich and Miller (1975) found that school age elementary children, who watched a great deal of television, had less

advanced syntactic structure than those children that did not watch as much television. The children who viewed less television, a sample of middle-class children, used longer sentences, more adverbs and adjectives, and more verbs in the future tense than the children who were heavy television viewers.

The effects of television viewing on schoolwork was examined by Schramm, Lyle, and Parker (1961). They tell of cases in which children were tired in the morning after

popular late night programs were shown. They also discussed the daydreaming that might be connected to the fantasy of television programs, also of a tendency of some students to expect to be entertained in class just as they had been the night before by the television. The study concluded that students who were low television viewers knew more about people, places, and events that were non-entertaining. They had more respect for activities that required intellect rather than abstract concepts. One difficult obstacle that educators must overcome is dealing with the inattentiveness of students. Students tend

to tune out repetitions after observing repeated commercials on television.

LaBlonde (1964) investigated the amount of viewing time, types of programs selected, and the television viewing habits of fifth grade students. The relationship between television viewing habits and school achievement were investigated. After careful and extensive analysis,it was reported that girls were effected more than boys with regard to intelligence, achievement, and socioeconomic status varying with the amount of television viewing reported. LaBlonde (1967) continued to study fifth graders and their viewing habits. He found that there was no relationship between scholastic achievement and television habits except in the area of work-study skills. LaBlonde's sample consisted of 294 children.

Schramm (1961) conducted a large scale study. The study established that children with the highest marks viewed television the most. Through this study it was also concluded that television viewing helped the low achiever to develop

vocabulary skills that the non-television viewer did not have. At the age of ten a "saturation point" was reached by the children with an IQ of 115 or higher. The children of middle and lower IQ reached this point at a later time. Busch (1978) agreed with Schramm's findings. Busch also found that younger children benefitted the most from watching television, but by age ten or twelve a saturation point was reached. At this time overall knowledge declined as television viewing increased.

Wagner (1980) reviewed literature available and concluded that students of lower intelligence watched more television while higher ability students tended to turn to reading more frequently as they matured. However, if they continued to view television too extensively, their ability to achieve declined. She also stated that there needed to be more research done in order to evaluate programs based on reading, writing, speaking, and listening and the

effects of television on reading skills and ability.

Ridder (1973) conducted a study that showed no

significant relationship between the total number of hours spent viewing television and acadmic achievement. Most children preferred recreational viewing as opposed to shows with educational value. She also believed that the children who neglected their studies to view television would find another activity to occupy their time if television was not available.

In a study, Barth and Swiss (1976), it was noted that there was a definite relationship between reading and television. At that time, however, the exact effect was not known.

Hutchinson (1979) proposed a Learning Model for watching televison. It suggested the need to motivate the student to directly relate television shows viewed with classroom experiences. Since children at that time, were watching 21 to 30 hours of television per week, it was suggested that it would be wise to optimize the use of television time.

As the years passed televiusion viewing continued to grow and expand its topics. As time moved into the 1980's

the research of Potter, Zuckerman, Singer, and Morgan were examined.

Will using television data in lessons or as a text cause youngsters to watch even more television than they do at present? Was the question presented by Potter (1981) regarding the integration of reading and television. Potter felt that since there was a great deal of material being presented by the television industry, educational publishers, and the government, that more should be known about the outcomes from its use. Can the television be used as a supplemental or a motivational tool, or as a direct instructor?

Zuckerman, Singer, and Singer (1980) conducted a study involving 232 students. Various factors were examined including IQ and reading scores to mention two. Questionnaires were distributed and data analyzed. The study found that the types of programs are important no matter how little television may be watched. They found

that if a child's viewing time increased so did their school related problems.

Feeley (1980) reported that after examining the amount of time spent watching television, the preference of programs of different age groups, and how television impacts on achievement and reading habits there was no consistent relationship between television viewing and achievement.

In a research report by Degrosky (1981) data were collected from 123 students in the seventh and eighth grades. The task was to examine if there was any relationship between age, sex, grade, socioeconomic status, intelligence quotient and the quality of television viewing and reading achievement. Reading test scores and sex had a statistically significant relationship to the quality of television viewing time.

Starkey and Starkey (1981) conducted a survey to determine some differences between third grade children who were reading up to expected grade level and those that were not. This expectancy was determined by the Spache formula. It was found

that those who were reading up to expectancy levels understood the reason for the worksheets, why they had to read in bed at home, why they had to have a hobby or pet, and why they enjoyed reading at home. No difference was found between the two groups in regard to amount of television watched, favorite television shows or books, and mothers working outside of the home.

A study completed by Bachen et al. (1982) was used to explore the process that underlys the relationship between television viewing and reading achievement. The results showed that: 1)reading abilities are dependent upon more than just the formal reading instruction offered by schools, 2)certain orientation toward reading or television can augment the effects of the amount of reading or viewing a child does and 3)it is possible to locate an orientation within television sequence that positively predicts reading achievement with cognitive involvement with television representing skills that paralled those necessary for good reading.

Research was conducted by Neuman and Prowda (1981) that examined the relationship between television viewing and reading

performance. It was conducted in the state of Connecticut and included questions relating the reading material available in students' homes, their attitude toward reading, and their viewing habits of the television. There were approximately 8,000 students in grades 4, 8, and 11 tested. The results indicated that younger students spent more time watching television than older students. Also, the students that reported that they enjoyed reading decreased with the age of the child. The reading scores of the fourth graders, who were supposedly the heaviest viewers, were not related to television viewing.

Neuman (1981) conducted another study in which 198 fourth, fifth, and sixth graders were studied. The relationship between television viewing and reading behavior was examined. Her major focus was on the amount of specific content television shows that were being viewed. She wanted to know if this affected reading achievement and the patterns of leisure reading. Through the permission of parents, intelligence and reading achievement scores were obtained for each subject in the study. The families assisted by keeping logs of exact shows viewed, the

number of books read, as well as the newspapers and magazines read over a period of four weeks. The results indicated that the total amount of television viewed was not related to reading achievement and leisure reading habits.

In another study by Neuman and Prowda (1982) 7500 students were included. They found that reading for pleasure should be emphasized more and that the viewing of television should be more carefully monitored by parents and teachers.

The literature I presented shows that there is a great deal of contradiction in regard to reading achievement and television viewing. The 1950's research showed that

there was a concern about how the invention of television was going to effect people's lives. During the 1960's the focus shifted to the content of programming and then in the 1970's positive and negative effects were addressed. During the 1980's the advancement of televisions' uses are continuing to be explored. Just as the world is changing

so is the place of television and its effects.

By some television is viewed as a villain, by others an asset. The amount and content of television may effect one child in one way and another child totally different.

Television in education is a controversy that will not go away (Lange, 1981). Possibly as educators we must examine our part in effectively teaching students to view television more critically and take advantage of its many positive aspects.

Television provides many experiences for many individuals. In order to obtain more results and draw any type of conclusions, we must continue to explore in this area. We must keep abreast of new material and its availability for our uses. We must also try to remember that communication, interpretation, and understanding takes place at different levels. All of these things will continue to take place in different forms and through many

experiences. The past data is in. It is now time to begin looking into the 1990's and the effect of television on the youth of today.

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